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ROAST BEEF INSTEAD OF HASH

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To make the bitter pill of required rhetoric palatable for college Freshmen, to harmonize the various interests, capacities, and degrees of preparation found among students from all classes of secondary schools, and to give training that will develop the student's ability to express himself with facility in the various subjects he is to take throughout his college course are but three sides to the complex situation which the instructor in first-year rhetoric faces. It is not an enviable task, nor is it an easily solved problem.

Despite the reams of rhetoric paper consumed annually, the hours of labor spent by the "gentle theme reader," and the red-ink corrections which logically follow, Freshman rhetoric still stands at the judgment bar with the verdict as to its efficiency in doubt. This is true despite the fact that certain reforms have been effected. Few instructors, for instance, assign abstract subjects, but somehow the inevitable "First Impressions of College" and the kindred "My First Big Football Game," "Should Freshmen Be Required to Wear Fresh Caps?" and "The Most Attractive View of the Campus" do not seem to arouse any great enthusiasm among the first-year students. It must be admitted that, though an effort is made to draw upon the individual's experiences and interests, most of the assignments are futile except possibly to develop some degree of facility in expression.

Rhetoric, nevertheless, is practically the only subject which is today universally required of Freshmen in colleges and universities. There must be some reason for this other than the well-established conservatism of college faculties with regard to changing their curricula. The requirement seems to be based on the belief that the training in Freshman rhetoric will make it possible for the student not merely to write rhetoric themes but to secure material, organize it logically, and express it clearly and with some degree of

effectiveness. Concretely, there is a hope that this training will function in the preparation of theses, reports, and other forms of expression demanded in history, sociology, psychology, and various collegiate courses.

To prepare students to justify that hope is a difficult problem in that the instructor must adapt his work to meet the student who enters his class with excellent secondary-school training and the one to whom a theme is practically an unknown species of torment despite the fact that he has "passed" the three years of required English in high school, most of which time was spent in floundering around trying to analyze and dissect literature that made no appeal to him. To keep the one interested while the other is gaining at least the minimum of technique is essential, and to do all this against the "necessary evil" attitude which prevails generally among students on account of the fact that rhetoric is a required subject is a task worthy of anyone's mettle.

The reason that so many fail is due not so much to lack of enthusiasm and effort as to the little-appreciated fact that rhetoric *per se* has very meager, if any, content. It deals with expression, and the average instructor is satisfied with anything which offers material for expression. As a result, there is seldom in the theme scheme of the rhetoric course any of the underlying principles of art—unity, coherence, and emphasis. There is no central idea, the material being chosen as a means to secure expression without regard to its value now or hereafter.

It is not the purpose of this discussion to enter into the situation thoroughly, but to tell with some detail of one attempt at the University of Michigan to give Freshman rhetoric content which proved of interest and benefit to the students, gave training which will function in the remainder of their college work, and brought to the instructor the keen satisfaction of witnessing real improvement in expression on the part of practically every student. Furthermore, it is a means which demands no exceptional gift or knowledge on the part of the instructor.

Because naturally the thing that the average individual is most interested in is himself, because I had seen so many young people come to the university and flounder around for several years without

finding a real aim or a serious purpose to direct their college work, and because I had seen others waste years in preparation for something for which they were not fitted or in which they were not keenly interested, I decided to abandon many of the conventional rhetoric themes in favor of a vocational study. My idea was to have each student make a rather thoroughgoing analysis of some vocation with special reference to himself.

The plan for the experiment was comparatively simple. It started with a questionnaire, the purpose of which was to get that background of the student which might affect his vocational inclination. The information included the size and type of his home town, his high school, the subjects studied in order of his preference and his grading in them, vocational training and experience, why he worked and why he quit, the use he made of his earnings, talents and training possessed which might help to support him, the occupations of his father, brothers, mother, sisters, and uncles, his first and second choice of an occupation, whether or not his parents approved and were willing to assist him financially, his physical condition, and interests in sports, amusements, and organizations.

Short themes followed, answering such questions as: Why did you come to the University of Michigan? What influenced you in your choice of an occupation? What is your purpose in choosing that particular occupation? What do you actually know about the vocation chosen and how did you secure that information? Just how seriously and how thoroughly have you considered the question? What should one know about the profession he expects to enter?

A second questionnaire was then given in which concrete information about the profession was demanded. This had the double purpose of getting definite facts as to the knowledge of the students with regard to their intended vocations and of making them realize how little they actually knew concerning the work they purposed entering. The questionnaire covered actual duties at the start, duties when established, the demand for the work, opportunity of getting a start, best location for a start, necessary and desirable training in school and elsewhere, apprenticeship, necessary professional development after graduation, cost of equipment at

the start, size of income at the start, rate of increase, size after five years, maximum and average, necessary standard of living and the cost, opportunities to earn money indirectly, social compensations, opportunities for civic responsibilities and social service, physical, mental, moral, and social qualities required, demand for executive and initiative ability, working conditions as to hours, routine, exposure, dangers, health, and morals, chance for daily recreation, vacations, and avocations, ease of changing business location, opportunity for specialization, advancement, change within occupation or to other similar occupations, restrictions upon expression of personal opinion and ways of living, other disadvantages, qualities possessed favorable to success, personal handicaps that must be overcome, fundamental ethics of the profession, and what has been done by leaders in the profession for the betterment of society.

As might be expected, very few had an adequate knowledge of the demands of their vocation, but the questionnaire had the desired effect of directing their investigation. It also aided them in filling the next assignment, which was to make out a course of study to follow during their university life and justify their selections. Next they prepared an exhaustive bibliography including lists of books, magazine articles, and pamphlets in the library dealing with their professions.

The final assignment in the vocational study was the preparation of a long theme discussing a vocation in its relation to the individual writer and carefully analyzing its demands and the individual's ability to meet them. Concrete information along the lines suggested by the second questionnaire was insisted upon. The minimum for the theme was 2,500 words. Several weeks previous to the date on which the theme was due a thoroughgoing analytical outline was handed in. This was criticized, corrected carefully, and then used as a basis for the theme. Accompanying the theme was a descriptive or annotated bibliography representing a minimum of fifteen hours of reading. In addition to this reading, the students were urged to talk with leaders in the profession chosen and get information and assistance from them. I made no attempt to influence their choice or to advise the students, as my knowledge of the various vocations is frankly superficial. I merely directed

the work, helping the student to find suitable material when his own efforts failed. My idea was to make each individual feel that he had a special problem and was responsible for working it out.

The information and results obtained, I feel, are suggestive and illuminating, although no claim is made for their value on a strictly scientific basis. In the first place, the survey was rather too limited to carry much weight as a scientific investigation. Secondly, while ninety-eight students participated in the study, only sixty-two completed it, the war situation combined with the usual Freshman mortality causing a large number to leave school.

Of the eighty-seven *men* participating, sixty-one felt at the start that they had made a definite choice of a vocation, while twenty-six were undecided. Among those from cities of more than 100,000 population, twenty-three had made decisions, six were undecided. Of those from cities between 5,000 and 100,000, twenty-eight belong to the decided group and twelve to the undecided. Twelve from rural communities had decided while ten had not. Of the eleven women, four from large cities had made up their minds, while one was in doubt. This ratio was reversed in the moderate-sized cities, while the one student from a rural community had decided. If any deduction can safely be made from these figures, one might infer that the tendency to make an early vocational decision diminishes with the size of the community. It is possible that the opportunities for observation and experience in the large cities, together with the spirit of competition, cause the youth to consider the future more seriously than do his cousins from the smaller cities and rural communities.

There may also be some relation between decision and scholarship. As far as possible the high-school grades of the students were secured, and the students were then grouped according to the standards of their respective high schools. Seventeen with excellent records had decided, six had not; twenty-two with good records had decided, eleven had not; fifteen with mediocre records had decided, six had not. It is doubtful if this superficial evidence would permit one to draw any real conclusions. It is probable, however, that excellent students have a tendency to regard the future more seriously and thus decide more readily than others.

Vocational training in schools functioned but little, as only fifteen had had any at all, and only about half of those had made any use of the training received. With one exception, none of the students had received any vocational guidance in school, although forty-two had given the problem of a life-occupation more or less serious thought, some going into the matter thoroughly by means of reading, conferences, and personal investigations.

Just what part vocational experience has upon decision is extremely problematical, as, while all but eight of the men and six of the women had had vocational experience of some kind apart from childhood jobs, only eight had had much experience identical with the work chosen for life. The vocations were decidedly varied in character. While the majority were summer vacation jobs, quite a number were more stable. At least nineteen students had worked a year before entering the university, and fifteen had worked more than a year. Twenty-two had had varied vocational experience.

That the vocational experience was taken seriously may be inferred from the fact that sixty-seven had saved money, and fifty-one had used at least part of the money to pay college expenses. This experience, together with talents possessed, makes at least fifty-one feel that they could earn money to help them secure an education if necessary. In fact, forty-two do earn a part of their expenses.

Environment evidently plays a more important part than experience. Eighteen, or nearly 20 per cent, have decided to follow the vocation of their father. It is interesting to note that the influence of the father is shown particularly in the medical and business professions. With one exception, every son of a physician has decided to follow his father's calling.

Law, medicine, and varied phases of business seem to make the strongest appeal. An analysis of the influences which determine definite choices or preferences may be of interest.

Of the twenty-one who have chosen law, five are the sons of lawyers, two are nephews, and one a brother. One was influenced by a friend, two by studies, six by early desires, and one each by the possibility of liking it, by snap judgment, and an idea of service.

Seven had either worked in law offices or been closely associated with lawyers. One other had given serious thought to the question. Nine had either superficial or no real knowledge of the profession.

Of the seventeen who expect to become physicians, six are the sons of physicians, one a nephew; four were influenced by their studies, one by an early ambition, and five by the idea of social service. Eight had either been closely associated with physicians or had had some experience in assisting them. Seven had given careful study and thought to the profession, two superficial study, and seven little or no thought.

Seventeen also chose some line of business activity. Seven had decided on general business, five on manufacturing, three on accounting, and two on advertising. Five of the first group are sons of business men, and the same number of the second group are sons of manufacturers. Three had been influenced by relatives, one by a friend, and two by the idea of making money. Eight had had some experience; seven had given the question serious thought and study, while five had given it but superficial attention. One had decided blindly on the advice of a friend.

Three indicated a preference for chemistry; two each for banking, railroad work, forestry, and dentistry; while efficiency engineering, city managership, agriculture, teaching, architecture, social service, and linguistic work were chosen by individuals. Only six of this group had given the matter serious attention. Four had had some experience. Four had relatives in similar work. Three were influenced by high-school studies.

Six of the eleven girls had a preference for teaching. One of these was influenced by the fact that both her mother and her father had been teachers, two were influenced by their studies, two by early desires, and one by the idea of service. Two had given the question serious thought, one had had experience, but the others had only superficial knowledge of the profession. Two young women chose interior decorating though they had given little thought to the problem; one had determined upon fine arts after careful consideration, another upon medical social service, and another upon concert singing.

Some of the individual reasons for the choices made are interesting. One selected law because he thought his ability to speak

several languages would help him. Another looks forward to medicine because when he was a young boy the death of his younger brother and sister brought so much sorrow to his mother that he resolved to devote his life to preventing such tragedies. One young man decided to become a certified public accountant because he wants a \$10,000 salary. The idea of social service influenced at least ten.

Probably of more interest and certainly of more importance is the report of the effect produced by the intensive vocational study which the individual students made. Of the fifty-three young men who completed the study, twenty-nine thought at the beginning that they had definitely determined what they should make their life-work, but five of them changed their minds. Of the four who had partially decided, two made definite decisions, one is still uncertain, and the other is even more unsettled than he was. There were twenty who were undecided, although some stated their preferences. Of these, twelve found themselves and are planning their college training with a definite purpose. Four who were undecided at the start are still in the same condition. Previous to their investigation, eleven had given the question serious thought, twenty some thought, nine superficial consideration, and thirteen none at all.

Six changed their vocational ideals, five adopting other lines of activity and one deciding that he did not care to follow the profession he had investigated. One changed from teaching to Y.M.C.A. work, one from forestry to medicine, one from linguist to teacher, one from business to chemistry, and one from medicine to business. In five cases questions of doubt were settled. Twenty were strengthened in their choice, and one made doubtful. Seventeen decided to change their plans either as to schools, time of schooling, outside experiences and training, or specialization within a profession; several, for instance, decided to take a seven-year instead of a six-year medical course. Twenty-five decided to make changes in their university course of study.

Of the eight women students reporting, four had made definite decisions before entering the university. One of the three who had partially decided made up her mind positively. One is still uncertain. Three had given the matter serious thought, two some

consideration, and the others none. Three found that the investigation intensified their decision, one that it made her doubtful.

Knowing that the slogan of the average Freshman students with regard to their instructor is, "We aim to please," every precaution was taken to secure as honest a reaction from the student as possible with regard to his judgment of the vocational study. In asking for this verdict, I made it plain that the work had been frankly an experiment, the merits of which I wanted each to consider thoroughly and then give his candid opinion.

Of the sixty-two students reporting, forty-two found that the vocational study increased their interest in rhetoric greatly, seven declared it added somewhat to the interest, five agreed that it did not detract, while six insisted that it did. Two were non-committal. Fifty-four considered the study worth while; four asserted that it had not proved valuable to them although they felt that it had to most of the students, while three others voted it a sheer waste of time. One was doubtful.

Although oral expression was given considerable attention in the rhetoric classes, none of it dealt with the vocational study. Forty-two students felt that oral themes on various phases of their vocational investigation would have been interesting and profitable. Six voted against such a feature.

Forty-five favored the introduction of thoroughgoing vocational study in high schools, while eight opposed it, most of the latter declaring that college was a better place to consider the question.

The foregoing survey gives a fair idea of the consensus of opinion of the students with regard to vocational study and its effect upon rhetoric. Some personal opinions from those who participated follow:

"When the subject of vocations was first broached in the rhetoric class, I was inclined to think of it as nothing more than a pedagogical device to fill up weak spots, and I viewed it with dismay, for I had given the matter very little thought. The rather exhaustive study I made in preparation of a thesis on 'Advertising as a Profession' served to intensify my desire to take up that work as soon as possible. . . . It [the vocational study] has surely been worth while in my case, for without it I would still be much in doubt as to the goal for which I am striving, and consequently much of my energy would be misdirected and misspent."

"Rhetoric was a bore to me until this idea of vocational study was introduced. Now I am aware of the fact that complete mastery of the principles of rhetoric is essential to a lawyer."

"On the whole the study was one of the things which I shall never regret, but count as one of the big things in my college career."

"Before I entered college I had a vague idea of what I was going to do, but now that I have read about the subject and given it a little thought, I have a very definite idea of what I am to do. I had no idea what I was going to elect. Now that I have looked the matter over, I know definitely what I shall study."

"The detailed consideration which I have given my intended vocation has surely been the most worth-while thing that I have received from this year's work. It has been most practical and at the same time most interesting."

"This study has truly been an awakening for me. I now realize the advantage of developing certain faculties I lack. . . . All this [study] has instilled into me a more serious conception of a successful lawyer and an even greater desire to be one."

"The study I made was a big factor in helping me find out whether or not I was suited for forestry, or whether forestry suited me."

"I am afraid that heretofore I had been too easily influenced by poetic lays concerning the birds, the flowers, and all the great and beautiful out-of-doors. In my vocational reading I was brought to a fuller realization of the hardships and disadvantages of a farmer's life."

"I found out from this study that my natural gifts are not sufficient to fit me for the practicing of law."

"The study gave me great aid in that it broke the ice of my indifference and caused me to give my first serious thought to the consideration of a vocation."

"I looked upon it [the study] as another drudgery to be tolerated. After reading a few magazines, I began to take a keen interest in them. The opportunities and life of a chemist were so vividly portrayed that I eagerly read everything I could find on the subject."

"When the assignment for the vocational theme was given out, I was disgusted and provoked because I thought I had made up my mind upon law as a profession and that I knew what I must be and do to attain a legal education. I went at the work of making the first bibliography half-heartedly, thinking that this was work and effort expended in a useless direction. I now realize my mistake. I have learned more in my reading and studying, preparatory to writing my long vocational theme, than I knew or even had thought existed before."

The last is the expression of a student who frequently brings joy to the heart of the instructor. A thoroughly sincere, conscientious fellow, he entered the rhetoric class figuratively with set teeth

and clinched hands determined to do his best with a required subject which he thought he thoroughly disliked and whose value he honestly doubted. His interest gradually got the better of him, however, and he completed the year's work with an excellent scholastic record and the humble admission that he had enjoyed rhetoric more than any other subject and thoroughly appreciated its value. The vocational study played an important part in his conversion.

The experiment has, I believe, apart from its effect upon the students and its value as a motivation for rhetoric work, shown a distinct need—that of vocational guidance among college and university students. It is true that high schools here and there are beginning to pay some attention to the problem. The work being done by Principal Jesse B. Davis, of the Grand Rapids (Mich.) Central High School, is particularly noteworthy. It is frankly admitted that the greater responsibility rests with the secondary institutions, but there will be for many years a distinct place for wise vocational counseling of, and investigation by, college students. Two things will be necessary to make this work most efficient—well-qualified advisers and concrete information concerning the various professions that appeal to college-trained men. Lack of being able to secure such information proved the severest handicap that my students labored under. While much has been written, it is either too general in character or too unauthoritative to be given consideration. Investigations of professions and what they offer surely afford a wide field for profitable research.

All this discussion, however, is based upon the assumption that such a vocational study as has been described is of value in Freshman rhetoric classes. While it is not proposed as *the* solution of the problem which every instructor confronts, it is a solution that I sincerely believe is worthy of the most careful consideration. This year's experiment has shown such excellent results and such splendid possibilities that I wish the plan might be tried on a large scale and its value more accurately determined.

In the first place, the student found something to express which seemed valuable to him. While he applied the principles of rhetoric at first somewhat consciously to his efforts, nevertheless, his main interest was in the thought. As a result there was a definiteness, a

freshness, and instructive content about the themes written that made the reading of them considerably less of a task than usual. There was also a noticeable gain in facility of expression as the work progressed.

The long themes were as concrete evidence of the success of the scheme as one could well demand. The students seemed to make an almost universal effort to produce something that would be deemed worth while. It was a test of wise selection of material to insure unity, of careful and logical organization to make coherence certain and to gain emphasis, of accurate yet virile expression of ideas to secure force and effectiveness. It was altogether a piece of work that the students will be called upon to do in various phases of their later college work. As a result of this training, they are going to know how to use the library to find material from books, magazines, and pamphlets, how to organize the material so that the writing of the paper will be a comparatively easy task, and how to present it in a readable and interesting way.

One thing which enhances the value of this work is that much training in rhetoric is acquired unconsciously—that is, the student does not realize that he is writing theme exercises the purpose of which is to teach him to write accurate, clear-cut sentences, to construct paragraphs properly, and to observe the established rules of good English usage. Some of the unconscious admissions of this on the part of students were amusing.

Of particular worth, also, was the preparation of the descriptive bibliography. It combined learning the proper form of a bibliography with excellent drill in summing up the chief thoughts of an article or a book in a few succinct sentences. These crisp reviews were not only effective in testing ability to write clear-cut sentences, but they helped to impress the chief points of the author upon the reader's mind.

From the standpoint of the instructor who enjoys a personal bond of relationship with his students, the vocational study offers an opportunity to bridge the gulf between the student and the teacher, who has, in a large institution at least, little opportunity for developing acquaintanceship other than in the classroom and at limited conference periods. The fact that I knew a great deal

about the homes and community background of the students and something of their aims, ambitions, and hopes made me feel a definite personal interest in each student, while he, in turn, realized that such an interest existed. Knowing that, he could not fail to take a different attitude toward me than if he had seen in me merely a person with whom he must spend a year in order to pass a required subject. This vocational study was the basis for numerous heart-to-heart talks, some of which were far removed from the province of rhetoric, yet they, at least, afforded an opportunity of influencing young lives, which, after all, is the keenest satisfaction which comes to the teacher.